

Wheatland Fire Equipment

Wheatland Fire Equipment (WFE), a family owned business that started in the basement of Howard Cozad's home in 1983, recently completed its fourth expansion. Cozad, who was fire chief at the time, recognized the need of emergency responders for up-to-date equipment and respiratory protection. He seized the opportunity to meet the demand and, today, the business is owned and operated by Howard and his two sons, Larry and Garey. This family-owned business has demonstrated consistent growth in both sales and employees; are good community citizens and continue to sustain their expansion projects – both in terms of square footage occupied, number of employees and sales.

Howard Cozad was born in Wheatland, graduated Wheatland High and started the business in the basement of his home in 1983. Brothers Larry (born in Wheatland) and Garey (born in Casper) are both graduates of WHS. Larry was a career firefighter in Casper before joining the family business in 1992. After high school Garey went to the United States Naval Academy, earning a degree in Applied Science Management (hybrid engineering business degree). He was commissioned an officer in the United States Marines, specializing in logistics. He later graduated from CU with an M.B.A. and, in 1992 started the Colorado branch of WFE. In 1997 he was instrumental in consolidating WFE's operations to Wheatland and returned to help run the business from his hometown. Today, Garey is the growing company's vice-president and chief executive officer, Howard serves as president and Larry is vice president of sales.



Their recent purchase of property at 2020 South Street in Wheatland, Wyoming gives WFE the square footage it needs to meet the growing demands of their business, and will create a total of up to fourteen new jobs, three immediately and eleven within the next five years. The expansion was facilitated through a program called Business Ready Communities administered by the Wyoming Business Council. The Town of Wheatland and the Wheatland Area Development Corporation (WADCO) received a grant allowing the Town to purchase the property from its previous owner and then conveyed it to WADCO who intended to market the facility to specific target industries with the specific criteria of creating new jobs. WADCO sold the property to WFE at fair market value, a transaction that included not only cash, but also taking WFE's former building at 1851 Oak in trade.



Wheatland Fire Equipment's ability to complete this transaction was also made possible by a loan through the Small Business Administration. Garey Cozad said that the SBA has been instrumental in their success and that Resource Partners such as the Wyoming Small Business Development Center has, in the past, helped them make smart business decisions. Principals and staff at WFE have all benefited from a variety of SBA/SBDC workshops and

seminars that are held in our community on a regular basis.

Larry Cozad has taught vehicle crash rescue to the local fire department on a volunteer basis for the past several years. Garey Cozad has served on local boards. Howard Cozad retired as a 30 year volunteer from the local fire department and WFE still has 9 employees that are firefighters in their communities including 3 in Wheatland. Ann Cozad (Howard's wife) has been an active member of Sigma Chi, a group that is always giving and Kathy Cozad (Garey's wife) spends countless volunteer hours helping victims of domestic violence through her association with Project Safe.

According to WADCO chairman Mike Daly, small businesses such as Wheatland Fire Equipment are the mainstay of our local economy. "Wheatland Fire Equipment has a substantiated history as an established business in this community, and their growth in employees and sales is a point of reference that helps us judge the impact of their business on our economy." Daly added that this project is a true success story and one that is a symbol of what WADCO and the Wyoming Business Council try to achieve with their economic development efforts.

WFE now employs 20 people locally and 12 throughout 6 states (Wyoming, Colorado, Washington, Montana, Oregon and Idaho). They market their respiratory protection, protective clothing and hydraulic rescue products primarily to fire departments and law enforcement agencies throughout the nation. Projections for 2004 are anticipated to reach up to \$15M in sales. WFE epitomizes what Wheatland defines as a successful small business and the fact that it is family owned makes it even more so.

Should you want to contact WFE phone them at (307) 322-5350 or FAX at (307) 322-2323 or email at garey@wfeonline.com. Their mailing address is P.O.Box 487, Wheatland, WY 82201.